



Town of Berwyn Heights

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MAYOR

Stephen D. Isler

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Jason W. Papanikolas (Mayor Pro Tem)

Amanda M. Dewey

Jeffrey Jay Osmond

Ethan D. Sweep

Worksession Minutes January 27, 2020 | 7:00 pm

Present were Mayor Stephen Isler, Mayor Pro Tempore (MPT) Jason Papanikolas, Councilmembers (CMs) Amanda Dewey, Ethan Sweep, and Jeffrey Jay Osmond. Also present were Town Manager (TM) Maria Broadbent, Chief Kenneth Antolik, Detective Daniel Unger, Code Compliance Director Hollyce Goodwin, Clerk Kerstin Harper, Treasurer Michelle Rodriguez, Assistant to the Town Manager Yvonne Odoi, and residents James Wilkinson and Drew Carlisle.

1. Announcements

Mayor Isler asked everyone to delete any emails that have gone out under his name requesting people to purchase Google Play cards. His email was hacked in attempt to scam people out of money. The Berwyn Heights Police has been informed and his email repaired.

2. Discussion Items

Walkable, Bikeable Task Force recommendations: James Wilkinson and Drew Carlisle co-chairs of the Walkable Bikeable Berwyn Heights Task Force (WBBH), were present to discuss the task force's recommendations on making Berwyn Heights safer for pedestrians and bicyclists. Mr. Wilkinson gave a summary of the report. He said one of the reasons this task force was launched is an increase in fatalities of bicyclists, as more bicyclists have taken to the streets and compete with automobiles and their often-distracted drivers.

Mr. Wilkinson first explained the goals and guiding principles of the report. He said the report is organized around 10 conflict zones, locations where vehicular and pedestrian/ bicycle traffic are in conflict. For each location, recommendations are provided on how to resolve or abate the conflicts. The recommended solutions represent the consensus of the task force members and, for the most part, are relatively inexpensive and easy to implement, such as additional signage or improved road markings.

In addition, a 'reach for the sky' option is offered for each location, such as pedestrian overpasses for Kenilworth Avenue and Greenbelt Road, as well as possible partners for implementation. The report also recommends several town-wide policies to improve traffic safety, notably the institution of a general 20 mph speed limit, posting 'local traffic only' signs to defeat wayfinding apps, creating a Council Rule to build a sidewalk as part of any road repaving project in the absence of barriers, and implementing street lighting solutions for dark areas identified by the Neighborhood Watch.

Mr. Carlisle said the idea for undertaking this study came from a public hearing that took a close look at the rush hour problems in the 8900 blocks of 58th and 60th Avenue in spring of 2019. The task force was assembled to take a broader look at traffic problems throughout the town and include pedestrians and bicyclists in the equation. The task force believes that walking and bicycling should be encouraged as a

healthier way to get around and to foster neighborliness and build community.

In discussion, the following points were made:

- Interesting ‘reach for the sky’ ideas, some of which may be pursued in conjunction with the redevelopment of Beltway Plaza, including better Greenbelt Road crossings.
- Sidewalk construction as part of road improvement projects should be given serious consideration;
- Section on education of bicyclists about rules of the road might be added;
- Section on school bus stop safety could be expanded;
- Section on best practices for walking in the dark could be added;
- Traffic engineering practices might be considered for reducing speeding, etc.

Councilmembers agreed to each earmark those recommendations to be considered for funding in the FY 2021 budget. Further recommendations should be organized in the form of a spreadsheet for tracking purposes. Mr. Willkinson and Mr. Carlisle said they will update the report based on this discussion and welcome additional questions prior to presenting the report at the February 12 Town meeting.

Project tacking update: Assistant to the Town Manager (TMA) Yvonne Odoi provided an updated spreadsheet with which she is tracking projects on behalf of TM Broadbent.

Clerk’s projects: Clerk Harper reported on the following projects:

- Scanning of vital documents - completed, except for the return and refile of the paper originals.
- Implementation of electronic agenda packets viewed on I-pads - completed.
- Creation of master list of agreements and contracts for purpose of renewal or rebidding - in progress.
- Inventory of charter amendments and ordinance revisions as the basis for codification - completed. Codification quotes obtained, in the event Council decides to fund enhancement.
- Website improvements undertaken continuously on as-needed basis. Goals and criteria for a wholesale redesign of website need to be formulated.

Police projects: Detective Unger reported on Police projects:

- Improve communication with Town businesses - Cpl Krouse created mailers for businesses.
- Hiring of new police officer - background checks and oral interviews completed; Town Manager meet and greet to be scheduled; swearing in planned for February Town meeting.
- New hybrid police cars ordered - delivery expected in late spring.
- Establishing process for out-of-commission Police and Public Works vehicles - meeting of department directors to be scheduled.
- Mobile speed signs purchase - completed but signs returned for replacement by vendor.
- Radar gun purchase - completed.
- Review of charter sections and ordinances relating to police for updating - yet to be initiated.
- Outreach videos production - waiting for new Public Information Aide and police officer to be on board to initiate project.
- Alleviating congestion on 58th and 60th Avenue - waiting for WBBH recommendations.
- List of police MOUs and agreements - forwarded to Clerk for Town-wide agreements inventory.
- Setting and posting of Police Station hours - completed.
- Review of Police fees and fines prior to budget process - completed.

Code projects: Director Goodwin reported on Code Compliance projects:

- Transfer of Personal Property Tax function to Code Department - training on current process

completed. Processing of current PPT using new Comcate module and evaluation in progress.

- I-pads purchase - completed. Further fine-tuning for field use needed, due to Comcate problems.
- Code ordinances review for updating - in initial stages.
- College Park study on municipal building permit authority - College Park to issue RFP soon.
- Outreach video production - waiting for hiring of Public Information Aide to initiate.
- Website improvements – collecting ideas for improving Code web page in progress.

Treasurer's projects: Treasurer Rodriguez reported on the following projects:

- Acquisition of asset management system - quotes obtained. Waiting for review and selection of vendor by Town Manager.
- Reconciliation process implementation - form created. Waiting for review and approval of process.
- Inventory of financial policies and procedures for updating - Consolidation of current policies and procedures in progress.
- Electronic payment processing - completed, except for finalizing ACH process with bank.
- In-house daily check processing - exploring feasibility with bank.
- Merger of Administration and Police Department QuickBooks programs - completed.

Public Works projects: TMA Odoi reported on Public Works projects.

- Acquisition of recycling totes, road resurfacing project phase II, and repair of Public Works garage - completed.
- Determining landscaping needs - to start in spring.
- Painting and carpeting of Town Hall and Senior Center - possible vendors for completing painting identified. Carpeting to be initiated after painting completed.
- Bond bill for Town Center improvements (including motion sensor lights) - application submitted. Under consideration by State Legislature.
- Hiring of Public Works Director - position advertised and several applications received.
- Hiring of Public Works part-time and full-time staff - completed.
- Replacement of truck #4 - ordered and waiting for delivery.
- Acquisition of smart recycling containers through 4 Cities Coalition - waiting for grant approval.
- Pruning and planting of trees - to start in spring.
- Exploring solutions for stormwater management - Prince George's County has been asked to explore solutions. Stream restoration project along Nevada Street trail progressing slowly.

Town Manager projects: TM Broadbent reported on the following projects.

- Bond bill for Town Center Improvements (see status under Public Works projects)
- Welcome sign committee - planning to draft resolution for Council to establish committee.
- Transfer of call-a-bus given to Greenbelt complete, except transfer of title. Recommendation on call-a-bus program for budget process being drafted.
- Employee manual overhaul - yet to be initiated.
- Police station architectural study - RFP published. Pre-bid meeting scheduled for February 12.
- M-NCPPC projects re picnic areas, Sports Park soccer field and dog park - on hold until M-NCPPC funding opportunities clarified.
- Veterans Day and Memorial Day celebrations - to be explored with Senior's Club.
- Pruning and planting of trees (see Public Works projects).

TM Broadbent said the Shade Tree Board has asked the Council to consider reviewing the Urban Forest Ordinance to add provisions to better protect the tree canopy. CM Dewey explained former Mayor

Rasmussen re-established the Shade Tree Board and initiated a discussion about amending the Urban Forest Ordinance to discourage the removal of mature trees. Several neighboring cities have tree ordinances that may serve as a template for updating Berwyn Heights' ordinance, featuring a variety of mechanisms to prevent removal and encourage replanting of trees.

Homeowners' Tax Credit (discussed out of order): TM Broadbent said the Council had decided to appropriate funds for the Homeowners Tax Credit after applications have been received. She recommends using the salary lapse from the vacancy of the 2nd code officer position to pay for the credit, which requires a budget amendment. Four applicants proved eligible for the Town's tax refund. The Council is requested to set an amount to be divided among the applicants.

CM Dewey said the Ordinance sets the credit at 10% of the applicant's real property tax bill. Depending on the total amount, the Council would then set an upper limit if needed. TM Broadbent said she will have the totals at the next worksession for Council's consideration.

Uses of fund balance (discussed out of order): TM Broadbent continued to discuss the Town's use of the fund balance in preparation for the upcoming budget process. The fund balance comprises unexpended funds of appropriated moneys remaining at the end of a given fiscal year. Treasurer Rodriguez has compiled the figures of fund balances going back to fiscal year 2014 that were used to balance the budget for the coming fiscal year and avoid tax increases. For comparison, the Council was also provided documents showing expenditures of the FY 2020 budget, including the use of the fund balance, which amounted to approximately \$308,000. That included the salary for a 9th police officer, a number of expenses resulting from deferred maintenance on Town buildings, and a variety of other expenses. Previously, the Town often did not appropriate enough funds to cover all needed maintenance but covered expenses above appropriated amounts retroactively with year-end budget amendments. This is not a good management practice and is no longer being done.

TM Broadbent said Town recently received real property tax revenue projections for FY 2021, which exceed those of FY 2020 by \$89,100. This may not be enough to cover enhancements approved in the FY 2020 budget and may require using the fund balance. With continuing reliance on the fund balance, it may eventually be insufficient for a rainy-day fund or the 3 months operating reserve. The aim is to have at least \$1.5 million of savings in the bank or a 7 months operating reserve.

MPT Papanikolas said, and the Council agreed, that he would prefer using fund balance only for one-time budget increases, such as capital purchases, and not operating expenses.

Mobile speed monitor: Treasurer Rodriguez said the Council approved the purchase of a mobile speed monitor costing \$4,800 from the FY 2019 budget. Upon receipt, the Police found the monitor was too big and cumbersome to be easily moved and returned it without being billed. As the books on the FY 2019 budget are closed, the funds were returned to the fund balance. Two smaller units costing \$6,000 will be purchased from the same vendor, with money taken from the fund balance. This requires a budget amendment in the form of an ordinance, which would be introduced at the February Town meeting. The Council had no objections. Chief Antolik said the new units are smaller and lighter but also solar powered. They can collect data about speeding.

Town survey results: CM Dewey reported on the results of the Town survey mailed out to a random sample of 200 residents in November 2019. The survey was intended to help the Council better understand residents' opinions on a range of issues, as well as their communication preferences. Of the 200 surveys, 55 were returned completed, for a 28% response rate. It is less than she hoped but it gives the Council a better idea of residents' perspectives.

To assess how representative of the greater community the survey sample is, it was compared to the demographic profile of Berwyn Heights residents in the American Community Survey (ACS) published annually by the Census Bureau. It shows that renters and foreign language speakers are under-represented among survey respondents; families with children match up well with ACS data; and residents who vote in Town elections are over-represented.

CM Dewey gave an overview of the survey findings, keeping in mind the limitations resulting from the low response rate and ranges of confidence. Most respondents (96%) say they are satisfied with the services the Town provides and the quality of life in Berwyn Heights (100%). Most feel safe in their homes (98%), and to a lesser degree driving, walking and bicycling in Berwyn Heights. Respondents top environmental concerns are the occurrence of trash and litter, recycling issues, and climate change. Most respondents favor such Town initiatives as stricter traffic infraction enforcement, adding a 2nd story to the Town Hall, establishing a dog park, installing security features and issuing construction bonds, but oppose periodic tax increases (70%) and switching to once a week trash collection (56%).

Further, 30%-33% of respondents have some difficulty finding and understanding information on the Town's code and permit requirements, although most report positive interactions with Code officials (84%). Respondents ranked the Bulletin, email notices and the website as their top news medium. In addition, many respondents said email or text messages for breaking news would be appreciated. Lastly, most respondents (96%) report that they know their next-door neighbors, at least by their first name. The survey also collects all comments respondents have written on the survey, which CM Dewey plans to aggregate into themes at a later time.

Councilmembers thanked CM Dewey for all her work on the survey and intend to use the data to help set budget priorities. Phil Ventura commented that the survey results are very valuable. Now that the scientific survey is complete, the survey questions might be published in the Bulletin to provide another data set to help firm up the results.

Four Cities agenda items: The next Four Cities meeting will be held on January 30 in College Park. The following agenda items were proposed: updates on a College Park tree ordinance and on a study to grant municipalities building permitting authority.

MML convention hotel: The Hampton Inn was selected as an accommodation for the MML convention.

Census 2020 update: CM Dewey said the Town should soon receive a large poster sign advertising the 2020 Census from the County. The Census Bureau is still hiring census takers at a rate of \$22/ hour.

3. Minutes

CM Dewey moved and MPT Papanikolas seconded to approve the January 6 worksession minutes. The motion passed 4-0-1, with Mayor Isler abstaining. The January 8 Town meeting minutes were distributed.

4. Department Reports

MPT Papanikolas said that the bleachers at the Berwyn Heights Elementary school field have been moved to the top of the hill and asked if they can be moved down again for use by the Boys & Girls Club teams. CM Dewey announced the upcoming Valentine's card and cookie making event on February 8. CM Osmond announced that the new Code officer has been hired and will start next week. TM Broadbent announced that Code and Police Departments will present their FY21 budget enhancement requests and all Town organizations requesting funding should also be present.

Phil Ventura said sometimes small changes can make a big difference in safety, such as the cutting back of brush along a sidewalk and extending the 'no parking' lines at the Indian Creek bridge.

6. Town Council Schedule

The Council reviewed the Council calendar. CM Dewey suggested moving a worksession that falls on a Monday holiday to the next day instead of the next week, i.e. Tuesday, February 18 instead of Monday, February 24. The Council declined to reschedule because TM Broadbent would be unable to attend.

7. Citizens Discussion

Phil Ventura commented on the WBBH recommendations. He suggested to mark school bus stops with yellow lines as a safety measure, and to have the Police more strictly enforce traffic violations, such as jaywalking.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 p.m.

Signed: *Kerstin Harper*, Town Clerk